



Garden State Pathways Program

Peer Mentor Handbook

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Contact details

Garden State Pathways Program

If you are unable to attend scheduled classes or participate in assigned work for whatever reason, please try to give as much notice as possible so alternative arrangements can be made for the student you have been assigned to. You **must** email the professors or supervisors concerned and copy the following team members in to the email.

- Bernadette Gismonde
Program coordinator
856-227 7200 ext 4503
bgismonde@camdencc.edu
- Bernadette Stettler
Office assistant
856-277 7200 ext 4336
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Learning outcomes – peer mentor

Garden State Pathways Program

The Garden State Pathways program can offer a variety of opportunities to facilitate the learning needs of the mentors who work in the program.

- 1 To have a basic understanding of the students' disabilities and any additional conditions that he or she may have:
 - How these impact social interaction and social skills
 - How these impact cognitive function and contribute to developmental delays
 - How the disability is acquired
 - Genetics
 - Birth trauma
 - Unknown origin

Some students are very open and informative about their disabilities. However, others are not so forthcoming; therefore, discretion must be used in conversations. Resources, other than the individual, can be used in order to gain an insight into the various conditions.

- 2 Have an awareness of the challenges that the student(s) may face
 - Academically
 - Understanding of the material that has been taught
 - Presentation of work for submission
 - Meeting deadlines
 - Socially
 - Isolation
 - Exclusion
 - Confidence building
 - Work related
 - Following instructions / direction
 - Working with others
 - Prioritizing
 - Focusing
 - Using initiative
- 3 Be aware of measures that can be taken to overcome and minimize challenges the student(s) may face
 - Academic support with specific classes / tutoring
 - Involvement in campus activities

- Support with job skills
 - Acknowledging success
- 4 Identify and develop key skills and qualities required in order to interact and communicate effectively with the student(s).
- Positivity
 - Motivation
 - Open ended questioning
 - Encouragement
 - Empowerment
- 5 Gain an insight into the life of the student(s).
- Leisure activities
 - Career interests
 - Experiences
 - Visions and aspirations for the future

Peer mentor expectations

Garden State Pathways Program

While working with the students enrolled in the Garden State Pathways program, the team has some basic expectations of you and asks that you follow these 'ground rules'.

- Be committed to the schedule that you provide. Please follow the email protocol at the front of this booklet if you are unable to attend so alternative arrangements can be made for the students that you are supporting. As much notice as possible would be appreciated.
- Be punctual to the classes / job placements. Make sure you are aware of locations of classes and meet with the student prior to class to assist him or her if required. Keep in mind that the students will view you as an example of a college student. Be a role model.
- Keep an accurate log of hours that you have worked with the signature of your supervisor. This will be required for your field work class if you are taking one. It is necessary to gain signatures on a weekly or daily basis.
- Refrain from the use of cell phones and other electronic devices in the classroom and when in the job placement area. This is a ground rule for the students and we expect the same from the mentors.
- To refrain from smoking on campus (this is a violation of campus policy).
- Do not offer the students transportation in your personal vehicle.
- Do not exchange monies or personal gifts with the students. If a student approaches you and asks to borrow money from you, this is entirely your personal decision. The program does not advocate the exchange of money between student and mentor. If you choose to lend students money, it is your responsibility to make the arrangements for the money to be repaid to you.
- As an employee of Camden County College and the Garden State Pathways Program, you reflect on both. Make us proud!

Mentor etiquette

Garden State Pathways Program

In day-to-day life we can all take simple etiquette for granted. Here are a few tips to avoid basic etiquette errors.

- If you think that a student may need assistance with something, don't be afraid to offer. We all need a little help from time to time. If assistance is accepted, wait for instruction from the student on what you can do best to help them. If assistance is declined then do not be offended.
- Always direct your conversation to the student. Avoid engaging with a fellow mentor or professor about the student when the student is present. Include the student in conversations by asking for their views and opinions. Do not respond to questions on behalf of the student unless the student seeks your input.
- Use your normal speech tone and pattern when conversing with the student. If they need you to speak louder or slower then they will ask you to do so.
- Some students have a disability that is difficult to detect visually. Just because you can't see the disability does not mean it doesn't exist. Be mindful of this.
- Make time available for those students that require a little extra time to accomplish tasks; do not make the student feel rushed.
- For those students who have difficulty speaking, allow time for them to express what they want to say. Do not finish sentences for them and if you do not understand what they are telling you, ask them to repeat themselves. Do not pretend that you have understood what they have told you. This has the potential to lead to miscommunications.
- Acknowledge success and achievements that the students have made. However, do not give excessive praise when accomplishing a 'normal' task. You do not want to be perceived as being patronizing.
- Avoid asking about the student's disability in the initial conversation that you have. Some students will voluntarily give you this information and are very knowledgeable about their conditions. However, other students are a little less willing to divulge this information. Remember to use discretion at all times when discussing this sensitive topic.

What makes a good mentor?

Garden State Pathways Program

There is no definite answer to the question ‘what makes a good mentor?’ However, there are several qualities preferred in order to become an effective mentor.

- **Effective listening skills**
 - Maintaining eye contact and giving the student your full attention.
 - Acknowledging what you have been told and confirming that you understand.
- **Guidance**
 - Helping the students to find direction in their studies and vocation. Bearing in mind never to push them.
- **Demonstrating practicality**
 - Giving advice about keeping on task and the importance of setting goals and priorities.
- **Provide insight**
 - By using your own life experiences to help the students avoid decision errors and pointing out good decisions that the student has made.
- **Accessibility**
 - The students may subconsciously use you as a resource for information. Be honest in your opinions and responses.
- **Use of constructive criticism**
 - When required, point out areas for improvement. Keep in mind the student’s individuality. Avoid attempts to change a student’s character. Merely suggest adjustments for specific situations.
- **Provide support**
 - Regardless of the situation, encouragement should be given in order to learn and improve.
- **Offer specific advice**
 - Acknowledge what has been achieved. Also focus on what needs to be, or could be, corrected.
- **Caring attitude**
 - Mentors should genuinely care about the student’s academic progress, career planning and personal development.

The Connecticut Mentoring Partnership and the Business and Legal Reports (1999) *Best Practices in Human Resources* Issue 653, September 30.

What a mentor is not

Garden State Pathways Program

Much focus has been given to the role and qualities of an effective mentor. However, it is also important to highlight what a mentor is not. This will enable you to take measures to prevent certain situations from occurring.

- **A mentor is not a surrogate parent.** Students enrolled in the Garden State Pathways program are here to take the first steps towards independent living and employment. They require your support in certain aspects, but also need to become independent in performing certain tasks. You are not assigned to the student to watch over their every move, but to guide them and provide skills to assist in becoming independent. Of course you would intervene if you witnessed a student embarking on a considerable error or mistake, but at the same time the students need to learn from their misjudgments.
- **A mentor is not a professional counselor or therapist.** The students will talk to you about sensitive issues and it is ok for them to do this and for you to listen and advise where appropriate. However, if a student is becoming fixated on an issue that is dominating time and resources you need to inform the student of this. If you feel that it is an issue of concern you must communicate this issue to the program coordinator or lead mentor.
- **A mentor is not a flawless idol.** The students will look up to you and respect you, however, it is important that they do not hang on your every word and idolize you. Limits need to be set with the students and these limits respected so that a professional rapport is maintained at all times. Some of the students are very affectionate and will show this affection towards you. However, it is important that this is not excessive and the students know what is appropriate and inappropriate in a variety of settings.
- **A mentor is not a social worker.** You are here to work with the students on an academic, social and vocational level. If a student speaks to you about any domestic issues that are of concern, then you must share this information with the program coordinator or lead mentor. Do not get involved in domestic situations or attempt to assist them personally with external issues.
- **A mentor is not a lending institute.** Students should all have their own supply of stationary and should not be continuously asking the mentors to supply these items for them. If the students ask you to lend them money, assess the situation carefully. We can all forget lunch money from time to time, but the student needs to learn how to problem solve and this kind of situation is a great learning opportunity! The program does not

advocate the exchange of money between students and mentors. If you choose to lend students money it is your responsibility entirely.

- **A mentor is not a romantic partner.** The mentor / student relationship needs to maintain a level of professionalism so that goals and outcomes will not be disrupted. If a student suggests romantic relations with you then this needs to be addressed immediately. Highlight the inappropriateness of this behavior and ask them to reflect on their actions. Do not encourage the student's advances should they occur. As we journey through life we all develop affections for different people and the students enrolled in the Garden State Pathways program are no different. However, limits and boundaries need to be set and maintained. Any situation that occurs should to be taken seriously. If you feel that you are unable to address the situation yourself, you must speak to the program coordinator or lead mentor.

Mentor settings

Garden State Pathways Program

As a peer mentor you could be assigned to a student in a variety of environments. These may include any of the following:

Classroom

You are likely to be assigned to a student(s) in order to support them in the classroom environment. How much input you have largely depends on the learning needs of the student concerned. Some students require one-to-one mentoring while others require minimal supervision with their studies. Some classes are taught to the students enrolled in Garden State Pathways program collectively; whereas other classes are integrated with traditional college students. Examples of classes taught collectively to the GSP students are: consumer math and social interaction. Some examples of integrated classes are: yoga, film appreciation, basic drawing and computer literacy. These classes have been chosen by the students themselves. **The class syllabus can be obtained from the professor teaching that class. It is advised you pick one up for your own reference.** You do not need to register for the integrated classes yourself in order to act as a mentor. However, by coincidence you may find yourself in the same registered classes as some of the students enrolled in the Garden State Pathways program.

The support that you provide in class will vary for each student. Some of the support that you will provide may include: assisting with note taking, prompting the student to make verbal contributions and participate in class discussions, re-explaining / rephrasing material, ensuring all homework and due dates are documented and assisting the students who need help communicate with their professors.

We advocate that you introduce the students(s) to the tutoring center to get their work reviewed. Students should be encouraged to visit the tutoring center independently whenever they feel the need.

Your role as a mentor does not end once the class is over. **You are expected to have correspondence with the student outside of the classroom.** You should plan study sessions and follow up at a time that is convenient for you both. This correspondence should be done via email and members of the GSP team, (Hazel, Bernadette Gismonde and Joyce) copied into these emails. It is vital that this procedure is followed. Not only for documentation purposes, but it also provided a paper trail should and concerns arise.

Social

As traditional students you will know that there is more to college life than studying. Socializing is a large part of campus life and a great opportunity to meet people and get involved with clubs and activities. The students often find it difficult to meet people, make new friends and communicate effectively. As a mentor you can act as a bridge to assist the students making new social connections. Find out what the student's interests are and work with the student to research what is available on campus that may be of interest. Stop by the student activities office and see what events are scheduled that the student may like to attend. Identify what clubs are forming and if they are of interest to the student (writing club, computer animation and book clubs may be options to explore). Visit the gym and find out what times are open for students to use the facilities. You may wish to explore when the college sports teams are playing and if the student would like to attend and give support. Utilizing the library for information on informative presentations and outside speakers may be another option to consider. Make lunch time a social event too. Here is an excellent opportunity to sit with fellow students and chat about social events and areas of interest. Introduce the students to your friends and acquaintances as this widens their base of acquaintances also.

Work placements

You may be asked to support the students in a work placement or internship. Here you will have the opportunity to work alongside the job coach and see what a vital role she plays in the student's vocational development. Areas of on-campus work placements include: office environments, cafeteria, athletics department and the tutoring center. Each of these areas has a job description that you will be provided with so you can assist the student in achieving their learning outcomes. Work placements are not restricted to task orientation, but also focus on social skills and behavior required in the working world.

You may also be required to mentor the students off campus with work experience and internships. Before you can do this independently you will be supported by an established member of the GSP team.

Tips for creative learning

Garden State Pathways Program

As with traditional students, each student enrolled in the Garden State Pathways program will have his / her own unique learning style. Over time you will be able to establish what is most effective for the student you are mentoring. Many of the students are receptive to learning that has a creative edge to it and you, as a mentor, can facilitate this creative learning.

- One step at a time. As with traditional learners, too much work at once can be overwhelming. Assist in setting simple, realistic goals for academic work. These can then be built up on over time. Too much work at once can lead to the student becoming frustrated and uninterested. This may result in none of the planned goals being achieved.
- As a mentor you will have the opportunity to develop effective communication skills that can facilitate learning. These skills may include:
 - **Empathy** - this may assist with the development of a trusting rapport in which learning can take place. As a traditional student you will be fully aware of the demands that college can have.
 - **Listening** – students may utilize you to air their frustrations with their college work load, social relationships or work place issues.
 - **Eye contact** – this will reassure the student that you are actually listening and interested in their points.
 - **Questioning skills** – open questioning is the most appropriate for gaining information. Questions that may be appropriate include: “tell me about your work this morning”, “what have you learned in math today?” and “that subject sounds interesting, why did you choose it?” Questions that will not extract information include: “how was lunch?”, “do you like math?” and “are you going to the movies this weekend?”
- Some students respond well to reflection and summarizing of subject areas. Take the time to recap homework and assignment due dates before the student leaves campus. Ask the student to highlight the key aspects from a class earlier that day. This gives the opportunity for questions or clarification.
- Some students may find benefits to visual learning, while others prefer to read material at their leisure. Some may learn best by writing material down and making notes and others prefer to discuss material with others. As a mentor you will be able to utilize different learning methods to meet the student’s individual needs.

- For those students who learn and retain information better using visual means, the following methods may wish to be considered: images, pictures, visual media, color coding, word maps, color systems and colored words.
- Some students have their own iPads and these can be used to facilitate learning in a variety of different ways. Encourage the students to use their iPad, and it's 'apps' to look up spellings of words, pictures of something that they are not familiar with, websites that can give them additional information on class material, check emails, organize their study schedule and document homework and deadlines. The iPads do have a small selection of games on them, and students are permitted to play them during leisure time. However, no games are allowed in class time and the iPad must be used constructively. Many of the students use YouTube as a resource. Encouragement should be given so the students to use such tools for educational purposes as opposed to watching movie clips and popular music.
- Utilize the library as a resource for further reading. The library has a large collection of journals, magazines, books and archived material that could be used to assist the students with their studies. Material from other libraries can also be ordered if required. The library is an excellent resource in addition to academic work. Students may wish to read the newspapers, magazines and journals out of personal interest.
- Introduce the student to the tutoring center. Often the student will benefit from having their work reviewed here before they submit.

Problem solving tips

Garden State Pathways Program

Some students may benefit from addressing their problems with support from others. As with traditional students, problems can arise from a variety of areas. Often by sharing these problems the task of overcoming them seem less of a challenge!

- 1 **Select one problem at a time** – whether it may be math homework, confidence issues, time management or conflicts in the class room, focus on this one problem and how it can be broken down. Also, explain how one problem can affect many other areas of life without them being aware of it. Through discussion, you may find that highlighting the problem actually makes the issue become less of a problem than initially thought.
- 2 **Define the problem** – when, how and why does it occur? Are there any triggers involved?
- 3 **Develop objectives** – develop realistic final goals. Look at the benefits of overcoming the problem and how this will also benefit other areas also.
- 4 **Highlight what will happen if the problem is not resolved** – some of the students may not necessarily see certain problems that they are encountering. Other students may not admit to problems that they are experiencing. The first step is to help the student identify the problem. Then steps to resolve can commence.
- 5 **Rewards for solving problems** – encourage the student to set personal rewards for solving or working to solving problems.
- 6 **Alternative solutions** – assist the student in looking at the bigger picture. If one method of problem solving is not working, then look at another means. E.g. if math is proving to be a problem and the student has attempted further independent study with no improvement, tutoring may be considered as an option. Do not solve the student's problem for them, but assist them in identifying methods in which they can solve their own problems.
- 7 **Assist in clarifying alternatives** – pay attention to what are realistic outcomes / goals. If a student has suggested an unrealistic method of problem solving, take measures to show why it is unrealistic.

- 8 **Encourage students to try methods for themselves** – this way they will see what works and what does not and move on to thinking about an alternative method.

- 9 **Action planning** – consider writing a plan for problem solving and include the following: steps to be taken, time limits, rewards, support networks, allowing time for setbacks and discussion of possible solutions.

Journaling

Garden State Pathways Program

While supporting the students enrolled in the Garden State Pathways program, we ask that you undertake a journal of your thoughts, experiences and expectations. Not only does journaling benefit the mentor in terms of personal growth and development, journaling also provides the mentor with a point for reflection. The Garden State Pathways program also depends on your journal entries as valid documentation for the program.

We ask that you submit a journal on a weekly basis. Please include your name and date at the top of the journal entry. Journal entries can be emailed to the lead mentor or dropped in the mail box provided in the GSP office. For those mentors who are in paid positions, **failure to submit a journal will result in the GSP withholding of your pay check.**

You may choose a writing style that is individual and works best for you. We ask you to be honest in your journaling. All entries will be treated with confidentiality, unless areas of concern have become apparent. You may write as much as you desire so long as it covers the specified areas listed below.

- Hours spent with the students both in and out of the classroom.
- Environments in which you have worked with the students (academic, social, vocational).
- Description of activities that you and the students have been working on.
- Areas of improvement / progress you have seen in the students
- Areas for improvement and what you have done to facilitate improvement in these areas
- Challenges you have encountered and your feelings about this
- Personal feelings about the students and the GSP, including any frustrations.

Please refer to the journal example, located at the back of the handbook, for the standard of journaling that GSP requires.

Textbook References

Garden State Pathways Program

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Notes

Garden State Pathways Program